

**Education Committee
Wednesday, March 15, 2023**

House Bill 6881: An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes Related to Educator Compensation and Paraeducators - Support

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Laurie White, and I have been a Para Educator for the past 25 years in the same school, Tolland Intermediate School. I love my job! Our school is like a second home. We all care for one another; all want the best for our students and to see them succeed. I offer the following testimony in support of House Bill 6881:

Throughout the years, the tasks I've been assigned to do have been varied and changed based on what was needed by the district. I have assisted many students with learning academic skills, life skills, emotional skills, and sometimes just how to cope with day to day living. The one thread that runs through that time was that much of what I accomplished was done with little formal training. Most times what needed to be done was "learned on the job".

I was hired as a Special Ed Para for a new program to integrate Multi-handicapped Special Needs students into Regular Education classrooms. The first duties I attended to during my 25 years included toileting severely learning-disabled students, male and female, aged 8 - 13 years old, cleaning up students who have soiled themselves as well as those menstruating. I adapted lessons, taught basic life skills, taught myself how to use specialized equipment, did daily physical therapy, fed students who were not able to do so, promoted social development with peers and teachers all while dodging punches, head butts, kicks, getting scratched, or spit upon. I was injured several times and had many bruises. I learned basic sign language on my own so I could communicate with several of the students, as well as creating storyboards. I also often redirected those who wished to pleasure themselves wherever they happened to be at the time. I did not have access to IEPs and was never allowed to go to PPTs.

Integrating the Special Needs Students into the Regular Education Classrooms was quite challenging, at first. I found that some teachers would welcome these students. Others were not so pleased to have them. I would always read the Regular Education classroom and exit with the student if necessary to maintain a safe and pleasant learning environment for everyone. Thankfully as the years progressed, having Special needs students in a Regular Education classroom became less of an issue.

Specialized Training, and access to the IEPs for taking care of the Special Needs students during the time period above would have helped me to be better in attending to their needs. Most everything was a "learn as you go" situation. I transferred from being a Special Education Para to a Regular

Education Para after several years to avoid burnout. My duties changed and were not as physically demanding as my previous position, however, now there were more emotional issues to deal with, as well as learning about all of the different programs in the curriculum. Again, skills and knowledge were learned “on the go”; with little to no training. Duties changed from year to year based on the needs of the district. As a Regular Education Para some of my duties included being a part time Library Para, Math Intervention Para, Reading Intervention Para, Classroom Support, and many duties - Lunch, Recess, Bus, and to assist wherever was needed for any particular day.

Currently, under the direction of the principal, I oversee a computer lab and am facilitating several computer-based programs which are directly tied to the students’ learning, and ability to navigate and succeed with in-house and state online testing. I monitor the students’ progress in the various computer programs; reports are regularly run and the data is then disseminated to the teachers, as well as the administration for their use. I make sure the lab is in working order, cleaned as well as sanitized according to protocol. I also interact with IT and companies, when there are software, hardware, login or password issues. I’ve also created several motivational plans to keep the students engaged and logging into all of the different programs on their road to success. I see every student in the school on a rotating basis about once a month. Keeping them motivated, excited, and participating in the various computer programs is very important. In this position, I am allowed access to IEPs and 504’s so that I am better able to assist students as necessary.

Again, most of what I’ve learned for this position has been through self-education. I’ve researched each of the many computer programs to figure out how they worked and to harvest the data needed to forward on to the teachers and administration. I did participate in the Compass Learning Modules that were offered this year and picked up some great transferrable information.

As I don’t work in the classrooms, I can only comment on when classes visit the computer lab. Sometimes if a para is absent, there is not a replacement and I make do. I have years of experience and usually I just “fill in” for the para if the student needs assistance while taking care of the rest of the class. For the most part, the students are very patient with all of the shortages we have. When they are in my Lab, they understand that I’m only one person and they may need to wait a bit for assistance. If I don’t happen to have a class at a particular time and there is a classroom that needs coverage, then they come to me, and I’ll work with the students on the various computer programs to help them progress even further.

Having been a Para Educator for 25 years I’ve seen many changes throughout the years. The duties of a para have become more complex with protocols, procedures, and a certain knowledge base. Expectations are high. However, training and pay remains low. 25 years ago I started at a little over \$8.00. This year, after being there for 25 years, I’m now a little over \$22.00 an hour.

All of the Items in the Bill that help to support the Para Educator are a wonderful thing. A Living wage, having affordable health insurance, enough staff so that one is not always covering for

someone, access to student information so that we may better able serve the students., specific meaningful training, and everything else contained in the Bill. These are things that will help our Para Educators to be the best they can be for our most priceless thing in the world – the children.

I urge you to support House Bill 6881.

Laurie White
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